



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Fact Sheet

## Safe Harbor and the Georgia Statewide Conservation Program for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers



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- Safe Harbor is a voluntary program that benefits endangered species and landowners simultaneously.
- Safe Harbor provides landowners management flexibility while ensuring a “net conservation benefit” to an endangered or threatened species. For red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs), net conservation benefits can be achieved through protection of existing RCW nesting and foraging habitats, use of prescribed fire to maintain suitable RCW habitat, and other management techniques.
- Landowners who agree to implement conservation measures for RCWs on their lands receive legal assurances that they will not incur additional, future restrictions on their land under the Endangered Species Act relative to the RCW, even if the number of RCWs increases.
- The concept of Safe Harbor was introduced by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt in 1995. Prior to that time, many landowners were hesitant to protect or enhance endangered species habitat on their land, due to concerns that they might attract endangered species and, therefore, be subject to additional legal restrictions.
- Approximately one-half of endangered species in the U.S. rely on private lands for the majority of their habitat. Therefore, endangered species conservation can only be accomplished with partnerships between federal and state governments and private landowners.
- Georgia’s RCW Safe Harbor Program is a “statewide” program. This means that rather than working to develop separate agreements between the Service and individual landowners, qualifying landowners will work with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to enroll under the existing statewide program. This streamlines the process and makes it easier for landowners to enroll in the program.
- Georgia’s is the third statewide RCW Safe Harbor Program, following South Carolina and Texas. In addition, two regional RCW Safe Harbor programs exist -- one in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina and one in coastal Virginia. To date, more than 75 landowners in the states with existing agreements have enrolled more than 156,000 acres containing 225 groups of RCWs.
- The Service hopes to create a statewide program with the State of Florida, offering Florida landowners in the Red Hills Region the same kind of land management flexibility to protect the RCWs as is now available in the Georgia portion of the Red Hills Region.
- More than 35 Safe Harbor Agreements encompassing more than one million acres exist across the Nation. The first Safe Harbor Agreement enrolled 5,200 acres of private land in the North Carolina’s Sandhills to protect the red-cockaded woodpecker. Other species currently being protected under Safe Harbor Agreements include the Attwater’s prairie chicken and the Aplomado falcon in Texas, the Schaus swallowtail butterfly in the Florida Keys, and the Gila topminnow in Arizona.
- Current Safe Harbor agreements cover properties ranging in size from 2.5 acres to 825,000 acres, making them attractive to both small landowners and corporate interests.

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**For more information  
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